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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 000926

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [OSCE](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: DFM KARASIN ON RUSSIAN FORCE BUILD-UP,
GENEVA PROCESS AND RESPONSE TO QUAD DEMARCHE ON OSCE
MISSION MANDATE

REF: A. BEYRLE E-MAIL APRIL 8
[1](#)B. STATE 034630

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador called DFM Karasin April 8 to express concern about the build-up of Russian forces in Akhlagori, Gori, and Gali in advance of the planned April 9 demonstrations in Tbilisi (ref A). Karasin responded that Russia's force buildup was "purely defensive/deterrent in character against possible provocations." He also repeated allegations of heavy build-up of Georgian forces, and said that Russia did not know what to expect. Karasin said Russia had agreed with EU envoy Morel's desire to move the next meeting of the Geneva process up to May 13-14 (vice 18-19). On April 9, members of the French, UK, German, and U.S. Embassies delivered ref B demarche to Karasin on the OSCE mandate for missions in Georgia. Karasin repeatedly pressed us to accept the Russian proposal for two separate missions, reporting to one center in Vienna, contending that nobody had given a good reason why Moscow's proposal was not acceptable. Saying that Russia agreed with most of the points in the demarche, he stressed that Russia supported continuing the OSCE mission in South Ossetia and wanted to see the Incident Prevention Mechanism (IPM) go into effect (repeated in MFA statement on April 10). When pressed on the need for monitors to be able to cross the boundary line in response to an incident, he said the April 14-15 discussions on the IPM could consider the idea. End summary.

Russian Force Build-Up

[1](#)2. (C) On April 8, the Ambassador called DFM Karasin to express concern at the Russian build-up of forces in Akhlagori, Gori, and Gali and to ask what the Russian intent was. Karasin said the Ambassador's call was "timely," especially in light of the events in Chisinau which "could serve as a bad example for some hotheads." Karasin contended that over the last two-three months, Russia had told the U.S., EU, OSCE, and UN of its concerns about heavy Georgian force buildup in regions adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, including "dozens of armored vehicles, 100s of spetsnaz, patriotic youth camps", etc. In light of "political uncertainty in Tbilisi and unpredictability of Saakashvili," Moscow did not know what to expect. He added that since Russia had assumed responsibility for assuring security in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the Russian force buildup was purely defensive/deterrent in character against possible provocations. Any suggestion forces would be used offensively was "not serious," Karasin said. When pressed as

to whether he could ensure that local military commanders would keep things purely defensive, Karasin replied "absolutely." He reiterated that there was no danger from Russian forces - the danger came from "Tbilisi leadership and hotheads surrounding Saakashvili." Karasin assured Ambassador Beyrle that "we got your message - and we hope you got ours."

¶3. (C) Karasin did not mention that the build-up was part of a "winter rotation" or "planned inspection," as other GOR officials had claimed. Akhagori was the area in which Moscow expected the most provocations from the Georgian side, so the "preventive force" buildup was highest there, he said.

Geneva Process

¶4. (C) Ambassador Beyrle noted the emphasis on the Geneva process in the Obama-Medvedev Joint Statement, saying we should not wait until late May or June for the next meeting. Karasin said Russia had agreed with EU envoy Morel's desire to move the next meeting up to May 13-14 (vice 18-19). This would make sense, since it would come after the UN report on May 9. If talks on the new mandate were successful, he said, the need for heavy Russian presence around Gali would be lessened. He added that South Ossetia was "a different case."

Quad Demarche

¶5. (C) The French and German Ambassadors and UK and U.S.

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A/POL MC's delivered ref B demarche to Karasin on April 9. Stressing that agreement on the OSCE mandate for the observer missions would help address conflicting allegations of build-up of forces by both sides, the French Ambassador urged Karasin to accept the latest Greek OSCE CIO proposal.

¶6. (C) Expressing his "happiness" in meeting with the Quad, Karasin intoned that "yesterday was the eight-month anniversary of the moment when Russia helped South Ossetia repel unwarranted aggression by Georgia against the people of South Ossetia." This was important, Karasin said, because it set the context in which the new mandate for the OSCE was being discussed. He added that either we maintain and build security and stability in the region, or we continue the "political games" aimed at restoring through diplomatic means the positions Georgia "forfeited" in 2008. There was still a lot of nervousness in South Ossetia about Georgia's intentions, even more so after the events in Moldova a few days before.

¶7. (C) Russia agreed with most of the points in the demarche, Karasin said, and believed we were "a step away" from an agreement. Moscow had repeatedly stated its interest in maintaining an international presence in South Ossetia, and supported the Incident Prevention Mechanism and would participate in the April 14-15 meetings on it, even though Abkhazia was still refusing to let it commence until there was a new UN Security Council Resolution on the monitors there. He stressed that he would "hate to see the consequences of withdrawal of the OSCE mission, which would lead to a worse situation on the ground."

¶8. (C) In response to the French Ambassador's pressing him to accept the latest Greek proposal, Karasin repeatedly said nobody had explained adequately why we could not agree to Russia's proposal for two separate missions, reporting to the same center in Vienna. It would greatly strengthen the role of the Conflict Prevention Center in Vienna, allow 20, "or more" observers in Georgia and eight in South Ossetia, and enable the Center to obtain and "unite" the information from the two missions, and report to the CIO. The question of names could be easily resolved. Karasin reiterated, however, that South Ossetia would need to agree to the mission there.

¶9. (C) When pressed again to accept the latest Greek CIO proposal, Karasin said South Ossetia could not accept one mission with observers on both sides. He also objected to the "zone of conflict" terminology in the Greek proposal, saying there was no "conflict;" it had ended on Sept. 8 (he ignored the German Ambassador's comment that the language said "August zone of conflict"). He argued that we should not "let the Georgians persuade us that the Russian proposal somehow implicates the question of status of South Ossetia," or allow them to use this to undo the Aug/Sept 2008 agreements. He contended that we should not see this as an issue of territorial integrity or lack thereof, and should stop arguing over "perceptions of status," and focus on achieving practical outcome. "We need a result; we need a mission, not wording," he argued. The Russian proposal would be the best way to accomplish this, Karasin insisted.

¶10. (C) When the German Ambassador explained that the problem with the Russian proposal was that it did not allow the monitors on one side to respond to an incident across the boundary line, Karasin said this could be discussed in the talks on the IPM on 4/14-15. He welcomed the idea that the next Geneva meeting would address a non-use of force pledge.

¶11. (C) The French Ambassador noted that failure to agree was risking our capacity to prevent another crisis in Georgia, and that as our countries were beginning to improve relations with each other, nobody wanted the situation in Georgia to hamper this or to negatively affect other, very important issues. He argued that Russia's and South Ossetia's objections to the Greek proposal were "only based on principle." Karasin said he understood the effort to "condition this issue to larger international political issues," but said we should try to find a practical solution. We still have time; we should "exercise flexibility," not try to "ram through" Greek proposal, he argued. Karasin closed by saying we should "think again" and work to find a compromise.

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MFA Statement

¶12. (SBU) In a statement posted on the its website describing the meeting, the MFA said that Russia "stressed that reaching a compromise was being hampered by an unconstructive position of a number of countries that were not prepared to take a realistic approach to the present situation in the region, were trying to substitute political maneuvering for the urgent problems of strengthening security in the region. The Russian Federation stands for the OSCE and other international organizations to operate in full compliance with the new political and legal reality in the region, and is ready for constructive talks on mandates for the OSCE's field presence in Georgia and South Ossetia. The possibility of reaching a mutually acceptable solution is real and depends on the flexibility and impartiality of approaches to be chosen," the statement says.

Comment

¶13. (C) The force buildup in the region is likely designed to create tension and put pressure on Saakashvili and his advisers just when they look weakest and most vulnerable. While we do not exclude that the military was trying to provoke something from the Georgians to which they could respond, Karasin and others at the MFA probably recognize that any use of force by Russia would be condemned internationally and would weaken opposition to Saakashvili internally, at least in the short run. The Russian military, of course, uses a different calculation.

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